



# Pedagogical Renewal and Professional Sustainability:

## Reinvigorating the Journey of Mid-Career Faculty

Adriana Grimaldi (she/her), Acting Senior Educational Developer & Team Lead, RGASC

Sanja Hinić-Frlog (she/her), Associate Professor,  
Teaching Stream and Interim Associate Dean,  
Teaching & Learning



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**  
MISSISSAUGA

**Robert Gillespie**  
Academic Skills Centre

# ACCESS CHECK

We encourage you to check, identify, and question your learning environment for any of the following and we welcome comments if there are elements that I can support to reduce barriers. Please let us know at any time.

- Technology
- In-person Space
- Resources
- Pace



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**  
MISSISSAUGA



# Land Acknowledgement



Art by Christi Belcourt

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

# SESSION OUTLINE

- Mid-Career Faculty: The “bridge” group
- Opportunities and Challenges
- Tensions: Teaching & Research
- Humanizing the “Ghosts in the Wilderness”
- Whole-Person Well-Being & Mattering
- A multi-faceted Approach to Renewal



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**  
MISSISSAUGA



# The “bridge” between faculty generations



How do you see yourself in that “bridge” role?

- mentoring early-career colleagues
- occupying leadership roles (formal and informal)
- somewhere between tenure/promotion (early-career) and retirement (late-stage career)

What characterizes the mid-career role?

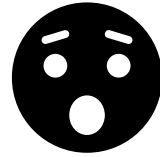
- pivotal moment
- academic career is increasingly composed of a variety of elements



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**  
MISSISSAUGA



# Your opportunities and challenges?



- hopeful, as next stage(s) of career are re-envisioned or re-crafted
- autonomy for greater exploration of research
- greater responsibility
- leadership opportunities
- peer mentorships
- refinement of pedagogy
- disengaged
- mid-career malaise
- fewer resources
- work long hours to achieve research and teaching goals
- heavy teaching loads related to administrative aspects of courses/programs
- heavy research/teaching loads related to supervision



# What are the opportunities and challenges?



Research tells us it can “run the gamut” from:

- disengaged
- mid-career malaise
- hopeful, as next stage(s) of career are re-envisioned or re-crafted

Does tenure/promotion bring “freedom”?

- alongside autonomy that allowed for greater exploration of research, came greater responsibility, and sometimes fewer resources



# Tension Between Teaching and Research



## The only way to “win”?

- work long hours and dedicate lots of time to both
- within the teaching domain:
  - directing theses
  - supervising internships
  - program or large course co-ordination (e.g. overseeing TAs)

## Incremental changes can make a big difference

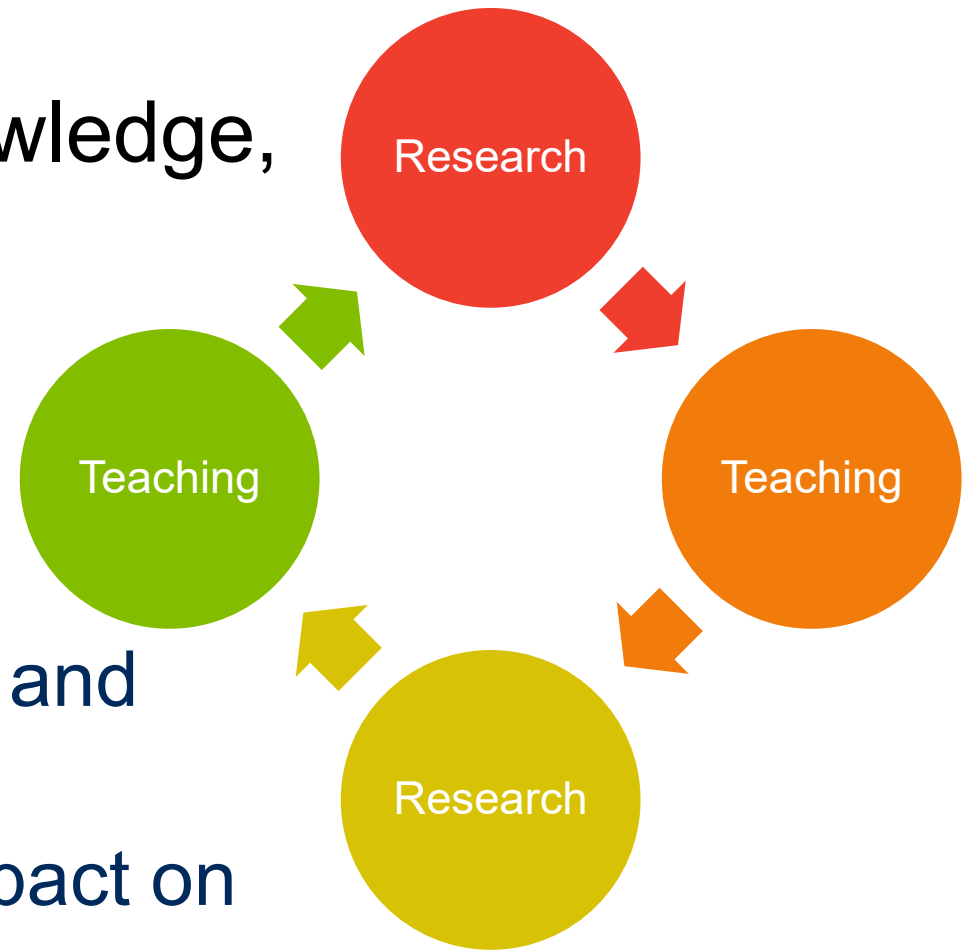
- the research of mid-career faculty is more interdisciplinary



# Humanizing the “ghosts in the wilderness”

Alongside acquisition of subject knowledge, refinement of pedagogy

- deeper commitment to students
- increased awareness of learning process
- greater commitment to personalized and positive learning experience
- a greater desire to have a lasting impact on students' lives



# Multi-faceted nature of the academic career necessitates a multi-faceted answer to renewal

Support the well-being of the **whole** person

- professional and personal relationships were recognized as the “life force” of resilience, tied very closely to “mattering”
- others are dependent on us, interested in us, and are affected by our accomplishments and challenges
- maintaining a work-life balance is a bigger challenge for women and underrepresented faculty populations

# Multi-faceted nature of the academic career necessitates a multi-faceted answer to renewal

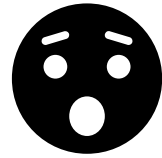
## Career Reflection and Planning

- professional and personal relationships were recognized as the “life force” of resilience, tied very closely to “mattering”
- others are dependent on us, interested in us, and are affected by our accomplishments and challenges
- [Ready, Set...Reflect!](#) (Monday May 11, 2026)

## Play to your strengths

- Strage et. al 2008 found faculty vitality improved when they played to their strengths

# Where are you in your journey with respect to...



- Supporting your whole well-being?
- Career reflection and planning?
- Playing to your strengths?



# Multi-faceted nature of the academic career necessitates a multi-faceted answer to renewal

- ❑ More support for strategic partnerships for career development initiatives
  - in addition to the support provided by professional organizations (annual meetings and conferences)
  - look for communities of practice
- ❑ Leadership Development ([Provost Leadership Academy](#))
- ❑ Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
  - [SoTL Series at the RGASC](#)
- ❑ How to manage increased service expectations
- ❑ How to manage and foster a scholarly agenda

# **Faculty Vitality directly impacts institutional aims**

- ✓ Teaching Excellence
- ✓ Research Excellence
- ✓ Sustainability and Innovation

# References

- Baker, V. L., Pifer, M. J., & Lunsford, L. G. (2018). Faculty development in liberal arts colleges: a look at divisional trends, preferences, and needs. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(7), 1336–1351.
- Baker, V. L., Lunsford, L. G., & Pifer, M. J. (2015). Systems alignment for comprehensive faculty development in liberal arts colleges. *To Improve the Academy*, 34(1–2), 91–116.
- Baldwin, R. G., & Blackburn, R. T. (1981). The academic career as a developmental process: Implications for higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 52(6), 598–614.
- Baldwin, R. G., & Chang, D. A. (2006). Reinforcing our “keystone” faculty: Strategies to support faculty in the middle years of academic life. *Liberal Education*, 92(4), 28–35.
- Boyer, E. (1991). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hart, J. (2016). Dissecting a gendered organization: Implications for career trajectories for mid-career faculty women in STEM. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 87(5), 605–63
- Karpiak, I. E. (1996). *Ghosts in a wilderness: Problems and priorities of faculty at mid-career and mid-life*. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 26(3). <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v26i3.183244>
- Petter, S., Richardson, S., & Randolph, A. B. (2018). Stuck in the middle: Reflections from the AMCIS mid-career workshop. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 34 (1), 557–576.
- Rice, R. E. (1984). Being professional academically. *To Improve the Academy*, 5, 5–13.
- Strage, A., Nelson, C., & Meyers, S. (2008). “Stayin’ alive:” Meeting faculty mid-career professional renewal needs. *Metropolitan Universities*, 19(1), 71–83.
- Tosti-Vasey, J. L., & Willis, S. L. (1991). Professional currency among mid-career college faculty: Family and work factors. *Research in Higher Education*, 32(2), 123–139.